

Black Mingo Baptist Church
(Belin Church, The Baptist Black Mingo Church)
South Carolina Secondary Road 162, 0.8 mi.
west of intersection of S.R. 41 and S.R. 162
Nesmith vicinity
Williamsburg County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-392

HABS
SC
45-Nesmith
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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Black Mingo Baptist Church (Belin Church, The Baptist Black Mingo Church)

Location: North side of South Carolina Secondary Road 162, 0.8 mile west of the intersection of S.R. 41 and S.R. 162, Nesmith vicinity, Williamsburg County, South Carolina

Present Owner: Southeast Baptist Association: Claude McIntosh, Center Baptist Church, Pleasant Hill, South Carolina

Present Occupant: Congregation of Nesmith Baptist Church (fifth Sunday of every month with five Sundays)

Statement of Significance: The Black Mingo Baptist Church is a significant Greek Revival temple form meeting house, the last surviving building associated with the nineteenth-century port of Willtown, on the Black Mingo Creek.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Construction: Circa 1843. The stone pier marking the northwest entrance to the churchyard has the date 1843 inscribed. William Willis Boddie's History of Williamsburg County (1923) gives the date 1843. The ledgers of John Gordon, a sawmill operator, show extensive purchase of lathing, flooring, scantling, boards, and lightwood plank, by Cleland Belin, in 1843. Cleland Belin's tombstone indicates that he died in 1868, and that he had been a member of Black Mingo Church for 23 years. Joe M. King's A History of South Carolina Baptists (1964) indicates that the Black Mingo Baptist Church was organized in 1844. The Minutes of the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association (1844) indicate that the Black Mingo Church gave \$50 that year for domestic missions. The Minutes of the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association (1845) state that the Black Mingo congregation was constituted in June, 1844. The building technology evident in the Church is consistent with this dating. The hewn timber, braced-frame construction, the sash-sawn weatherboard, and the use of both wooden pegs and machine-cut nails, are representative of the state of construction technology in rural South Carolina of this period. The Greek Revival stylistic influence is also compatible with the circa 1843 dating.

2. Architect: Not known.

3. Contractor: Not known.

4. Original and subsequent Owners:

From the initial construction, circa 1843, until 1868: Cleland Belin. His will, probated October 14, 1867, states that he had the Black Mingo Baptist Church built on his land. The will provided for the Church to be devised to the care of his executors, and, after the death of his executors, the Church to be devised to such Trustees as the white members of the Church might elect. The will specified two acres of land to go with the Church. (See appendix)

From 1868: Trustees of Black Mingo Baptist Church.

From 1936: Trustees of Nesmith Baptist Church. The congregation of the Black Mingo Church having been dissolved by 1920, and the building abandoned, the Trustees of Nesmith Baptist Church assumed the mantle of responsibility for the building, citing authority from Cleland Belin's will; in a resolution dated October 25, 1936.

The Nesmith Baptist Church is a member of the Southeast Baptist Association.

5. Original Plans and Drawings: No known original plans, specifications, contracts, drawings, or descriptions.
6. Known Alterations: The original wooden shingle roofing was removed, and replaced with composition shingle on plywood sheathing. Remnants of the wood shingle roofing are intact in the attic of the building.

The pulpit, reportedly, has been lowered.

Lead ornaments, said to have adorned the pews, are no longer in place.

New locks have been installed on the doors.

Some of the original window sash and glass has been replaced.

The stairs leading to the northwest and southwest doors have been replaced with new brick stairs. A wooden stair leading to the northeast door is still in place, although severely deteriorated.

A brick wall and chain link fence was built around the churchyard in 1970, to enclose the yard and to protect the building from vandals.

A photograph of the Black Mingo Baptist Church by Carl Julien was published in 1951, in Pee Dee Panorama, by Carl Julien and James McBride Dabbs (University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, S.C.: p. 53.) This photograph depicts the building prior to the construction of the brick wall and chain link fence, and prior to the installation of the plywood and composition shingle roofing.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated With The Building:

The town of Willtown, on the banks of Black Mingo Creek, was a thriving port during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The town decayed in the later nineteenth century, and was abandoned by the early twentieth century. The Black Mingo Baptist Church congregation had disbanded by 1920. The Black Mingo Baptist Church is the only standing building connected with Willtown. There remain some foundations and gravestones at the site of Willtown.

Cleland Belin, who financed the construction of the Black Mingo Baptist Church, was a prosperous merchant, and an owner of flat-bottom boats for trading along the Black Mingo Creek between Willtown and Georgetown. He was senior deacon of the Black Mingo Baptist Church, and was one of Willtown's most prominent citizens. Cleland Belin was born in 1792, and died on September 13, 1868. He is buried in the churchyard of Black Mingo Baptist Church.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Black Mingo Baptist Church is a Greek Revival temple form meeting house, dating from circa 1843, and is largely intact. The entablature and the barrel-vaulted nave are especially noteworthy.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: A rectangular building measuring 25' 9" x 40' 9"; three bays on each elevation. Two stories.
2. Foundations: Brick piers, supporting hewn timber sills and a central girder. Hewn joists notched into sills, and resting atop girder.
3. Walls: Sash-sawn weatherboard, without beading; wooden water table with double skirting beneath; corner pilasters with Tuscan capitals, supporting a full entablature.
4. Structural System: Heavy timber braced-frame construction, pegged, with some use of machine-cut nails (both L-head and hand-shaped heads): joints are mortise-and-tenon, halved, or butted. The structural system is exposed at the gallery level.
5. Exterior Stairs: One wooden stair, dilapidated, leading to the northeast door; two new brick stairs, leading to the southwest and northwest doors.
6. Fenestration: All elevations except the southeast elevation are two story, three bays, with central double doors. First story windows are nine-over-six wooden sash, with fixed upper sash and movable lower sash. Second story windows are six-over-six wooden sash. All windows and doors have round-arched heads, with intersecting segmental muntins (Gothic sash) in the fanlights. The southeast elevation has a large central thirty-over-thirty wooden sash window, with a round-arched head and Gothic sash fanlight. Two flanking windows on the first floor level are nine-over-six. Some sash and glass has been replaced. The doors are three-panel double doors, with wide stiles and rails.
7. Entablature: A full wooden entablature, in accord with the corner pilasters, encircles the eaves. The entablature has an architrave, a fascia with a double fillet and a cyma reversa molding, and a plain cornice with a corona, a cyma reversa and fascia, and a beaded cavetto. The full entablature is also raked in the pediments of the northwest and southeast elevations. Wooden panels with scriptural quotations appear on the fascias of the southwest and northwest elevations.
8. Roof: A low-pitched gable roof, with full pediments on the northwest and southeast elevations. The roof ridge is longitudinal, and perpendicular to the facade. Roofing, originally, was wooden shingle; some wooden shingles are still visible in the attic. Composition shingle on plywood sheathing now covers the roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Plan: A rectangular meeting-house plan, with longitudinal orientation; no altar. A pulpit is centered at the southeastern end of the church, opposite the main entrance, with open wooden bench pews facing the pulpit. Two rows of wooden columns, vaguely Tuscan, carry a U-shaped gallery, along the northeast, northwest, and southwest walls.
2. Stair: One corner stair, at the north corner: two runs with an intermediate landing; very steep. The run along the northwest wall is open, with a simple balustrade and molded handrail. The run along the northeast wall is closed. A simple wooden rail guards the stairwell at the gallery level.
3. Flooring: 1 3/8 inch tongue-and-groove hardwood flooring, four inches wide (varying). The flooring is laid directly on the floor joists.
4. Wall Finish: Wainscoting of three beaded boards, with chair-rail, on the first floor. Wide vertical boards above wainscoting. Intermediate pilasters (corresponding to the vertical posts of the structural system) along the walls, with the chair-rail carried around the pilasters. The pilasters carry a simple entablature, which features wooden panels with scriptural quotations. On the gallery level, there are wide horizontal boards on the northwest and southeast walls, with the structural system exposed over most of the northeast and southwest walls: posts, studs, and diagonal braces, with the interior surface of the weatherboarding exposed. There is some plaster chinking on the joints and the inside surfaces of the weatherboarding.
5. Ceiling Finish: Wide boards, unornamented, on the first floor beneath the gallery, and on the second floor. A suspended barrel vault of lath and plaster is located over the central part of the church.
6. Doorways and Doors: Double three-paneled doors, with open mortise joints, on the northwest, northeast, and southwest elevations. Simple wooden door surrounds encompass the doors and semicircular fanlights. No interior doors.
7. Trim: Beaded wainscot boards; simple Tuscan pilasters and columns, supporting the gallery and interior frieze.
8. Furnishings: Wooden pulpit on raised dais, at southeast end of the nave. Open wooden bench pews on first floor; simple wooden bench pews in two tiers at the gallery level.
9. Hardware: Metal hinges and bolts on doors, of unknown age. New locks have been installed on the doors.
10. Lighting, Heating, Plumbing: None. A cast-iron stove, not in use, is beneath the benches of the gallery.

D. Inscriptions:

1. Interior Friezes:

Northwest wall: The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Northeast wall: Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Southeast wall: When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

2. Northwest end of vault, panel: Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
3. Panel above southeast window: God knows thy thoughts. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
4. Pulpit front: And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. Mark XVI Chap. 15 & 16

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. Mark XII Chap 30 & 31

5. Exterior frieze, southwest wall: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.
6. Exterior frieze, northwest wall: Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

E. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and Setting: The Church is located in a swampy, pinewoods region of Williamsburg County, facing northwest. Elevation is 25 feet above sea level. No other buildings are located near the Church. Some of the adjacent pine forests have been cleared of timber. Black Mingo Creek is located to the north and east of the Church; the archeological remnants of Willtown are located on the Creek, to the north of Black Mingo Church. Jacks Creek is located east and south of the Church.
2. Landscaping: The Church is surrounded by a level churchyard, containing approximately 75 marked graves, including the graves of Cleland Belin and his family. Two granite piers, one of them marked "The Baptist Black Mingo Church A.D. 1843," stand in advance of the northwest elevation of the Church; two similar unmarked piers, with attached iron pintles, are in advance of the southwest elevation. A modern brick wall, two feet high, with a metal cyclone fence atop it, now encircles the churchyard, incorporating the stone piers. All trees have been removed from within this wall.
3. Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates: 17/643935/3720790

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary and unpublished sources:

- Ledger of John Gordon, 1843, in possession of Miss Marjorie Altman, Kingstree, S.C.
- Will of Cleland Belin, 14 October 1867. Probate Records of Williamsburg County, Will Book D, pp. 403-406. Williamsburg County Courthouse, Kingstree, S.C.
- Resolution, Nesmith Baptist Church, 25 October 1936. Probate Records of Williamsburg County, Will Book D, pp. 500, 501. Williamsburg County Courthouse, Kingstree, S.C.

Secondary sources:

- Boddie, William Willis. History of Williamsburg: Something About the People of Williamsburg County, South Carolina, From the First Settlement of Europeans About 1705 until 1923. Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1923, pp. 195, 253, 292, 318, 319, 321.
- Florence Morning News (Florence, S.C.), 8 August 1976.
- King, Joe M. A History of South Carolina Baptists. Columbia, S.C.: General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964, pp. 432, 446.
- McGill, Samuel D. Narrative of Reminiscences in Williamsburg County. Columbia, S.C.: Bryan Printing Co., 1897, pp. 165, 264.
- Minutes of the Eighteenth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Welsh Neck Church, Society Hill, November 10th-13th, 1849. Charleston, S.C.: J.A. Burke, 1850, p. 8.
- Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Session of the South-East Baptist Association, Held with the Black Mingo Church, November 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1903. Greenwood, S.C.: Connie Maxwell Orphanage Print, 1904, p. 14.
- Minutes of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Black Creek Church, Darlington District, November 7-10, 1846. Charleston, S.C.: T.W. Haynes, 1847, pp. 2, 6, 7.
- Minutes of the Fifty-Fifth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Florence Baptist Church, Darlington County, S.C., November 17-19, 1886. Greenville, S.C.: Hoyt and Keys, 1886, p. 22.
- Minutes of the Fifty-First Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Welsh Neck Baptist Church, Darlington County, S.C., November 9-12, 1882. Greenville, S.C.: Baptist Courier Book and Job Office, 1883, p. 30.
- Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Swift Creek Baptist Church, Darlington County, S.C., November 11-13, 1885. Greenville, S.C.: Hoyt and Keys, 1885, p. 24.
- Minutes of the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held in Cheraw, S.C., Nov. 8-11, 1845. n.p., n.p., n.d., pp. 7-9, 17.

Minutes of the South East Baptist Association, Held with the Kingstree Baptist Church, Williamsburg Co., S.C., November 19-21, 1886. Greenville, S.C.: Hoyt and Keys, 1886, pp. 3, 9.

Minutes of the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Gapway Church, Marion District, S.C., November 9-12, 1844. n.p., n.p., n.d., pp. 7, 9.

Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Darlington Church, Darlington District, November 12-15, 1859. Charleston, S.C.: A.J. Burke, 1859, p. 30.

Minutes of the Twenty-Ninth Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Black Creek Church, Darlington District, November 10-13, 1860. Charleston, S.C.: A.J. Burke, 1860, p. 24.

Minutes of the Twenty-Second Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Hartwell Church, November 12-15, 1853. Charleston, S.C.: Walker and James, 1854, p. 12.

Minutes of the Twenty-Third Anniversary of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association, Held with the Ebenezer Church, November 11-14, 1854. Charleston, S.C.: A.J. Burke, 1854, p. 16.

Minutes of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association at Its Seventeenth Anniversary, Held with the Antioch Church, Darlington District, S.C., November 11th-14th, 1848. Columbia, S.C.: I.C. Morgan, 1849, pp. 6, 9.

The County Record (Kingstree, S.C.), 22 May 1974.

The Weekly Observer (Hemingway, S.C.), 26 April 1979.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The Black Mingo Baptist Church recording project was undertaken by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Historical Programs Section, in cooperation with the National Architectural and Engineering Record, during the winter and spring of 1981, under the direction of John E. Wells, project supervisor, with Martha Walker, Elizabeth Mallin, Suzanne Pickens, Mary Watson, and Jill Kemmerlin of the Department of Archives and History, and with Edmund Kirby-Smith, of the Waccamaw Regional Planning and Development Council. The history of the Church was researched by Mrs. Elaine Eaddy, of the Three Rivers Historical Society, and by Mary Watson, of the Department of Archives and History. The large-format photographs were prepared by Hunter Clarkson of Columbia, South Carolina. James Vaseff, of the Atlanta Regional Office of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, provided guidance and technical assistance.

Appendix: Will of Cleland Belin
14 October 1867

Will Book D
Office of the Probate Judge
Williamsburg County, South Carolina

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Item Second. The Benign Giver of all good, the God whom I have tried to serve put it into my heart and gave me the means to build the Black Mingo Baptist Church near my residence, which said Church with two acres of land whereon the same is situated I will devise and bequeath to my executors hereinafter named for and during their natural lives and the lives of the survivors, or survivor, and after their death or the death of the last survivor then to such Trustees as may be elected by the votes of the white members of the said Church, In Trust nevertheless for the use and purposes following and no others, That is to say in Trust for the use of such persons as may be organized into a Church or who are now organized into a Church there belonging to the Baptist Denomination of the same faith practice and order as now held by the said Denomination of Christians, but it is hereby made a condition of this devise and bequest that the said Church is not to be controlled and managed by its coloured members at any time hereafter. The two acres of land hereby given and devised shall be laid off by taking the point of intersection of the two public roads whereon the same is situated, as a starting point, and measuring an equal distance on both roads so as to lay off a square.

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In Witness whereof I the said Cleland Belin have hereunto set my hand and seal this the Fourteenth day of October - in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty seven and the ninety second year of American Independence.